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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1985, the Oregon Department of Education conducted an assessment of eighth graders' writing skills. It was the first statewide assessment to be scored analytically according to six traits: ideas and content, organization and development, style, word choice, syntax/sentence structure, and conventions (grammar, punctuation, spelling, usage, capitalization and paragraphing). After the tests were scored, an interpretive panel of teachers and curriculum specialists convened to draw conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses in student performance and to identify key issues for consideration in the future. Among their findings and recommendations are the following: (1) student performance was least acceptable on the traits of ideas and content, and organization and development; (2) student performance on the other four traits was relatively more acceptable, though improvement is desirable; (3) careful consideration should be given to the prompts used in subsequent assessments; (4) information on ideas and available resources that can help teachers of writing should be provided; and (5) the scoring guide used to rate student papers for the assessment reflects strong parallels with the teaching of writing as a process. (Test results are included, as well as the analytical scoring guide.) (HOD)

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1985 Oregon Assessment

Writing

Grade 8

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OREGON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

1985

WRITING

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OCTOBER 1985

CS 209 608

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The conduct of Oregon's Statewide Assessment could not have been accomplished without the cooperation and dedication of many individuals. Foremost, were the students, teachers and administrators who were involved in the administration of the tests. Several committees also played important roles in the assessment, including a content panel to help us determine the content and items to be used on the test, a testing advisory committee to help determine the procedures, and an interpretive panel to help analyze and interpret the results. The members of these committees are listed at the end of the report. In addition, within the Department of Education the following individuals were extremely valuable in conducting the assessment in a professional and thorough manner: Thelda Bevens, Language Arts Specialist, Don Fineran, Mathematics Specialist, Ninette Florence, Reading Specialist, Steve Slater, Evaluation Specialist, Gale Roid, Assessment Specialist, and Susi Ayers, Assessment Secretary.

There were also a number of agencies and contractors who provided assistance to the project. In particular, National Computer Systems provided the support for printing and distributing materials, as well as scoring and reporting the results. Washington County Education Service District conducted the scoring of the papers included in the writing assessment, Vicki Spandel supervised the scoring of the writing papers and she and Don Blanchard, from the scoring team, conducted workshops throughout the state on the scoring method, Susan Smoyer helped prepare the final reports, and Michael Hiscox and Evelyn Brzezinski, from Interwest Applied Research, provided support for the construction of the tests.

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OREGON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT 1985
WRITING

Introduction

In spring 1985, the Oregon Department of Education conducted a statewide assessment of eighth graders' writing skills. A representative sample of eighth graders from throughout the state--approximately 5,800--participated in that assessment. Though this was not Oregon's first writing assessment, it was the first statewide assessment to be scored by analytical criteria. That is, it was the first attempt to distinguish the components of fine writing, to define each component as a part of a definitive scoring guide, and to score those components individually.

This report summarizes the highlights of the 1985 Oregon Statewide Writing Assessment. We hope that it serves to answer many of the initial questions you may have about the assessment itself, and about the writing skills of Oregon's eighth graders. At the same time, we ask you to recognize that the purpose of assessment is often less to answer questions than to raise the right questions. The last few years have seen a virtual revolution in the teaching of writing, not only in Oregon but throughout the country. We are beginning to put to use what we have learned about the effective teaching of writing, and the Analytical Scoring Guide used by the state for this assessment strongly supports the teaching of writing as a process. But even given the impressive efforts of many instructors, much remains to be done. The information provided through this and future assessments can point us in the right directions for improving writing instruction and serving our students better.

BRIEF HISTORY OF WRITING ASSESSMENT IN OREGON

The Oregon assessment program was initiated in 1973 to measure students' performance in the basic skills of reading, writing, and computing. The purpose of the program has been to establish a data base for improving instruction and curriculum in these skills. Oregon began by testing reading, computing, and writing-related skills (e.g., identifying sentence fragments, using capitals correctly) measurable through objective, machine-scorable, multiple-choice tests. Later, a recommendation was made to assess writing directly through a writing sample: that is, an actual example of student writing that would be scored by a trained rater.

In 1978, the first statewide direct assessment of writing (i.e., via writing samples, not objective multiple choice items) was conducted in Oregon. Students at grades 4, 7 and 11 were tested. A representative sample of schools throughout the state participated; they were selected on the basis of size, organizational structure, and geographic region (metropolitan, east, west).

The results were scored holistically. Holistic--or general impression scoring, as it is often called now--is essentially a rank ordering of papers from highest to lowest performance. The ranking, or scoring, is based on the comparison of test papers with anchor papers, or model papers (sometimes called range finders) selected for their representativeness. Since Oregon used a 4-point scale with its holistic scoring, raters received model papers for each of the four score levels (a 4 paper, 3 paper, and so on), and assigned scores to students' test papers by matching them against the model papers. These model papers, like the test papers themselves, revealed a mix of strengths and weaknesses: strong vocabulary, but poor organizational structure, or strong ideas, but weak mechanics, and so on. But these traits or qualities of writing were not addressed or scored individually. In holistic scoring, scores depend on the rater's overall impression of how the piece as a whole works.

In 1982, a second statewide direct assessment of student writing was conducted. Participating schools were chosen according to the same random sampling methods, and students at grades 4, 7 and 11 were tested. Again, the papers were scored holistically.

Analytical Scoring: The Need for More Diagnostic Information

Instructors whose students participated in the 1978 and 1982 writing assessments received feedback on how well students could write in relation to the range of performance. Those who had scored the student papers met after the scoring to identify the general characteristics they had observed at the various score levels: 4, 3, 2 and 1, and these impressions were included in the final report.

In preparation for the 1985 writing assessment, a panel of writing teachers and curriculum experts reviewed the methods for scoring student papers. They desired more specific information than was available through holistic scoring. They wanted a scoring guide that would specify in advance the traits (ideas, organization, word choice, and so on) important to fine writing, and the strengths and weaknesses likely to be observable at

each score level. If, for example, a paper was strong on ideas, but weak in sentence structure, that difference could not be reflected in a single holistic score; but it could easily be reflected in analytical scoring where traits are rated individually. The desire for a comprehensive, diagnostic profile of students' performance was an important consideration influencing Oregon's decision to conduct an analytical writing assessment.

Instructional Advantages

Analytical scoring offers important instructional advantages. A comprehensive, well-defined scoring guide is in effect a statement about what quality writing is. In addition to its application in the statewide assessment, a comprehensive analytical scoring guide can be used:

- To make assessment results clear to various audiences.
- To help students' understand what qualities are important in good writing.
- To help beginning writers establish an orderly, systematic plan for editing and revising their writing.
- To help teachers design writing instruction based on the qualities they wish to see demonstrated.
- To help parents, students and others understand how student writing is evaluated.
- To provide consistency in the way teachers rate student writing.
- To provide a vocabulary that educators, students and parents can use in talking about writing and writing instruction.

SELECTION OF THE OREGON ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENT WRITING MODEL

Once the decision had been made to conduct an analytical assessment of writing in Oregon, it was still essential to identify a scoring model. Numerous models were reviewed by the Department of Education prior to the 1985 writing assessment. A content panel reviewed the models and recommended that the model developed in 1984-85 by the Beaverton, Oregon School District was the most appropriate for use by the state. That model is reprinted in Appendix A. Notice that it comprises six traits:

- Ideas and Content
- Organization and Development
- Style
- Word Choice
- Syntax/Sentence Structure
- Conventions (Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling, Usage, Capitalization and Paragraphing)

How the Model Was Developed

The validity and usefulness of an analytical scoring guide depends heavily on the procedures by which that guide is developed. The Oregon Analytical Trait Writing Assessment Model was developed by language arts teachers, grades 3 through 12, from the Beaverton (Oregon) School District during 1984. In developing the model, these language arts instructors:

1. Reviewed existing models to determine which traits they wished to score.
2. Further reviewed models to begin defining each significant trait.
3. Asked professional writing assessment specialists to review the initial draft of the model.
4. Revised the model based on the consultants' recommendations.
5. Conducted a field test to provide student papers on which the model could be validated.
6. Tried the model on student papers, and further revised it to ensure that it was indeed a valid and reliable scoring guide.

The developers of the model wanted a scoring guide (and an instructional tool) that would be as universally understandable and acceptable as possible to language arts educators of diverse backgrounds. Because great care was taken in field testing, reviewing, and revising the guide, the developers felt confident--and state reviewers shared their confidence--that the guide was indeed a reliable and useful rubric for scoring students' writing.

Characteristics of the Guide

We've already noted that the guide incorporates six distinct traits, each of which is scored individually. Notice that each trait is defined at the 5, 3 and 1 score levels. For the 1985 writing assessment, Oregon used a 5-point rating scale, with 5 high. Through extensive field testing, it was determined that raters could readily and validly assign scores of 2 and 4 (just as well as 1's, 3's and 5's), even though those score levels had not been explicitly defined. The rationale for limiting the definitions to three levels was to provide a reasonably compact model that would not be overly cumbersome in scoring or in classroom instruction.

Readers are asked to keep in mind that the definitions for each trait at each score level are not based on hypotheses of what instructors hoped to see or thought they might see. On the contrary, they are refined descriptions of what instructors did see repeatedly in actual student papers--the characteristics that trained, experienced language arts teachers used in distinguishing excellent writing from poor.

The five levels of the scoring rubric do NOT correspond in any way to grade levels: A, B, C, D and F. To view them in this fashion would lead to serious misinterpretation of the results and would distort the spirit of the assessment. An analytical assessment, unlike some forms of writing assessment, is not judgmental in nature. It is diagnostic. The purpose was to identify the strengths and weaknesses in students' writing at various levels. To assist your interpretation, consider that at the 3 level, strengths and weaknesses approximately balance. At the 4 level, strengths begin to outweigh weaknesses, and at the 5 level, strengths predominate. Conversely, at the 2 level, weaknesses outweigh strengths somewhat, and at the 1 level, weaknesses predominate. Keep in mind too that a student's score on one trait may be very different from his/her score on any other trait. More will be said about interpretation in a later section.

ASSESSMENT AND SCORING PROCEDURES

Test Administration

Local administration of the test took place during the week of March 4-8. Two testing sessions were required. The first session was used for introduction of the topic and for students to write a rough draft. The second session was used to revise the rough draft and write the final copy. The recommended time for each session was 45 minutes.

Students wrote in response to the following prompt:

> Think of a special friend you have, did have once, or would like to have in the future. What are some things about this person that make you value his or her friendship? This person might have had some particularly good qualities, a special personality, or might have been especially helpful to you, or just have been enjoyable company. In your writing, be sure to include these things:
>
> - name the friend;
> - tell what it is about the person that is so important to you;
> - use specific examples that show why you value this person's friendship.

Selection and Training of Raters

A team of approximately 24 raters met at the Washington County ESD on the Portland Community College Rock Creek campus during April 1985 to score the results of Oregon's 1985 writing assessment. Raters had been carefully screened and interviewed prior to selection for the team. They were required to have a strong language arts background and familiarity with the purposes for the assessment. Nearly all had had teaching experience at or near the eighth-grade level. Many had been professional writers or editors as well, and more than 75 percent had experience as writing assessment raters.

The initial training took approximately a day, and included the following steps:

1. A thorough review of the scoring rubric, including the steps by which it was developed, and suggestions on using it effectively in scoring.

2. A review of the common causes of rater bias--e.g., tendency to score high or low on particular traits, over-attention to one trait at the expense of others, tendency to be influenced by the appearance of the paper, and so on.

3. Practice in rating student papers, comparing scores with those of colleagues, and discussing differences to resolve them and ensure that all raters were scoring with parallel perspectives.

In addition to this initial training, refresher sessions (brief training periods) were held throughout the two-week scoring process to give raters additional practice, and ensure that they were continuing to function as a team.

Scoring

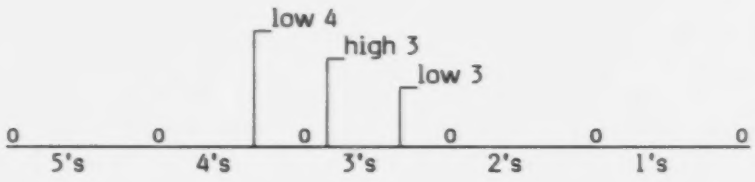
Each paper was scored twice, by two separate raters working independently. Rater 2 did not know what scores had been assigned by Rater 1. Each paper received six scores (one for each of the six traits) from each rater. These pairs of scores were then added to produce final scores for each of the six traits. For example, if a paper received a 3 on Ideas and Content from Rater 1, and a 4 on Ideas and Content from Rater 2, the final score for that paper on the trait of Ideas and Content was a 7. Scores for separate traits were not totalled to produce an overall holistic score, however; that would defeat the purpose of the analytical approach which is to specify strengths and weaknesses in students' writing trait by trait.

Raters were encouraged to score traits in any order they wished, and to refer often to the scoring guide for assistance in rating the papers. In addition, throughout training, they accumulated numerous practice papers on which scores had already been assigned. These served as writing models for the various score levels in much the same way that range finders provide level anchors for holistic scoring. Raters internalized the scoring guide fairly rapidly, and were able within a day or so to score rapidly, though each student's paper received thoughtful consideration.

Resolutions

Papers that had been scored twice were reviewed to determine which had discrepancies (differences in 2 points or more on the scores for any given trait) and required a third reading, or resolution. A difference of one point on the 5-point scoring scale was not considered disagreement. Here's why. Picture the scores along a continuum of quality, in which there is actually a range of 1's, range of 2's, of 3's, 4's and 5's. Along this continuum, a low 4, let's say, is actually closer to a high 3 than a high 3 is to a low 3--as the following illustration shows:

5-POINT SCORING SCALE CONTINUUM



Extensive training and repeated validation of score definitions revealed that raters did in fact mentally use these high's and low's in assigning scores. That is, they did think of a paper as a "high 3" or a "low 5" or a "mid-range 2" and so on.

Papers containing any scores that differed by two points or more were given to the head reader/trainer, assistant head reader, or to one of the most qualified raters on the team for resolution. Disagreements of two points or more occurred in fewer than 5 percent of all cases. An inter-rater consistency (or agreement ratio) of 80 percent or better is generally considered acceptable. Thus, an inter-rater agreement of 96 percent may be considered relatively high, and should give users of the assessment results additional confidence in the scores.

The "OMIT" Papers

Occasionally, it was necessary to omit a paper that could not be scored in the usual fashion. Papers labeled OMIT generally fell into one of these categories:

- Totally blank.
- Completely illegible (actually could NOT be read at all).
- Extremely brief (one sentence, sometimes two).
- Off topic (typically, the "My Dog Fred" papers, in which the student--for whatever reason--chose to write on something entirely different from what was requested for the assessment).

A few papers were labeled "OMIT: Scorable." These were papers which, though off topic, still seemed to the readers to demonstrate enough of the students' writing skills to merit a score. Results for these papers were not entered into the final data showing state averages because, for assessment purposes, performance on two totally different tasks cannot be fairly compared.

Factors in Maintaining High Inter-rater Consistency

Several means were used to keep inter-rater consistency high. These were:

- Regular group scoring of "problem" papers (identified by raters).
- Continuous refresher sessions throughout scoring.
- Continuous large- and small-group discussions of the traits and their interpretation.
- Specific, ongoing identification of strengths and weaknesses in papers at all score levels.
- Regular feedback to individual raters on their personal performance relative to that of the group.

All raters had identification numbers and recorded these numbers on the test booklets as they assigned scores. Raters who tended to score high or low with respect to any trait received immediate feedback on that tendency; therefore, they had a chance to adjust their responses through additional practice or conferencing.

Reporting

Assessment reports were returned to participating schools and districts in late May and early June, giving results at the student, classroom and building levels. District-level reports were provided if all eighth grade schools were involved. Guides were provided to help local educators understand and interpret the reports. The Statewide Summary Report and a sample School Summary Report are provided in Appendix B.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PANEL'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The Oregon Writing Assessment Interpretive Panel met at the Oregon Department of Education in Salem on June 17, 1985, to review the results of the 1985 statewide writing assessment. They met for three purposes:

- To help lay and professional audiences understand the results more fully.
- To identify key issues for consideration in the future.
- To offer recommendations concerning actions the Oregon Department of Education might take to improve the instruction of writing.

During their meeting, the panel members reviewed the prompt, the procedures by which raters were selected and trained, the methods by which scores were assigned, and the scoring guide itself. In addition, they examined sample papers at various score levels. They looked at scoring data, especially the distributions of scores on all traits. (See Appendix C for a list of panel members.)

Following are highlights of the panel's findings and recommendations.

- Students demonstrated a wide range of performance with respect to every trait. While many students revealed weaknesses that demand attention, many others showed remarkable skill in writing.
- Student performance was least acceptable on the traits of Ideas and Content and Organization and Development. More instructional emphasis should be placed on these crucial areas. Improvement in students' thinking will occur when teachers learn more ways of dealing effectively with generating whole compositions and developed units of thought, not just the mechanics of writing. Teachers generally have many resources available for designing instruction relating to sentence structure or conventions, but fewer resources for helping students generate ideas or organize them effectively. Provide inservice related to both traits to help teachers build a repertoire of techniques and skills in these two critical areas.
- Student performance on the other four traits--Word Choice, Style, Syntax/Sentence Structure, and Conventions--was relatively more acceptable, though improvement is desirable.
- Provide a model designed to help teachers manage peer response groups (as a part of editing) more effectively. That model should strengthen the transition from teacher-structured or peer-supported activities and independent writing/editing. Some students may have been so dependent on teacher-instructed or peer-supported activities that independent writing and editing proved difficult to handle.

- Make use of existing networks--such as that established by the Oregon Writing Project--to encourage wider sharing of ideas on the teaching of writing. In addition, provide information on available resources (books, workshops, seminars, organizations) that can help teachers of writing.

- Support the concept of regional coordination by training resource persons in regional areas to provide inservice on writing assessment (both at district and local levels) and the teaching of writing as a process. Ensure that administrators and superintendents are included in the inservice. Provide followup to any inservice activities conducted.

- Make information available to teachers concerning the state-of-the-art writing instruction.

- In future assessments, give students and instructors (in advance) more information about the purposes and procedures related to the assessment. Ensure that students have access to information that will help them understand the results.

- The Scoring Guide used to rate student papers for the assessment reflects strong parallels with the teaching of writing as a process (generating ideas, drafting, organizing the overall structure, then revising wording, sentences, conventions). This parallel has important implications for inservice related to the assessment.

- Careful consideration should be given to the prompts used in subsequent assessments. Teachers' and students' comments indicated that most found the friendship prompt acceptable, appropriate and understandable. Yet, when future prompts are selected, issues such as the following should be examined:

  - The type of writing (narrative, expository, or argumentative) that the prompt is likely to elicit.

  - The suitability of the prompt for students at the grade level tested.

  - The need to strike a balance in the wording of the prompt between offering structure and guidance on one hand, and allowing students freedom of expression on the other.

  - The need for balance between interest and appeal (what students will enjoy writing about), and respect for privacy (avoiding a prompt that is too personal, too intrusive).

  Students themselves may be able to offer important guidance concerning the kinds of prompts that would be most appropriate.

  Selection of a prompt--particularly one with universal appeal--is an extremely difficult task, and sufficient time must be provided for this critical step.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN STUDENT WRITING: A TRAIT BY TRAIT ANALYSIS

Note to Readers

If you have not yet reviewed the Analytical Scoring Guide, please take time to do so. It will greatly enhance your understanding of this discussion and all to follow.

Introduction

The following analysis presents the average scores for eighth graders as a whole, trait by trait and the percentages of students for whom strengths outweighed weaknesses or vice versa. A few student papers are reproduced here as examples. Obviously, writing is a highly subjective and personal task, and each student's writing is unique. Nevertheless, the examples should help illustrate some of the common problems and strong points that raters discovered in the papers.

> Students demonstrated a wide range of performance with respect to every trait. It is worth noting that while many students revealed weaknesses that demand our attention, many others showed remarkable skill in writing. The purpose of this assessment has been, therefore, not only to focus on problems in writing, but also to identify what is working well in order that students may be given positive examples of good writing to emulate.

Keep in mind in reviewing these scores that individual students' scores--as well as averages for a class or district--may differ considerably from what is reported here. Each student's performance represents a brief glimpse into his or her capabilities based on one task performed on one day. We recognize that many factors--including attitude, fatigue, understanding of the assignment, and previous experience--may influence a student's performance. Therefore, instructors must use their own discretion and judgment in determining whether the scores for an individual student are representative of that student's abilities. Across the state, the factors affecting performance tend to balance out so that the averages for eighth graders as a whole provide an accurate profile of actual writing skills.

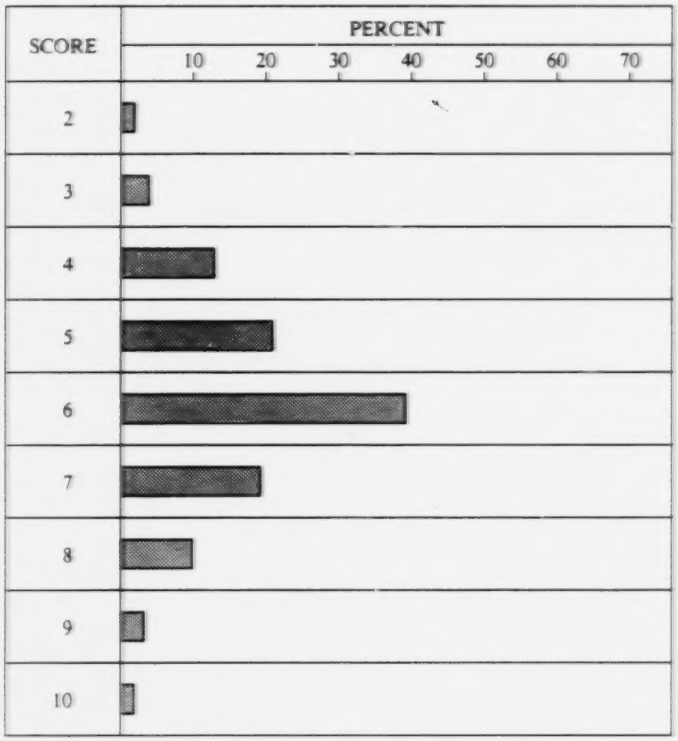
Trait 1: Ideas and Content

The average score for eighth graders across the state on the trait of Ideas and Content was 5.9; in other words, for the typical student, strengths and weaknesses were about in balance.

Balance is reflected in a total score of 6--two 3's--while at scores of 7 or higher, strengths begin to outweigh weaknesses, and at scores of 5 or lower, weaknesses begin to overshadow strengths.

Overall, 25.5 percent of the students revealed more strengths than weaknesses on this trait; 32.8 percent revealed more weaknesses than strengths. And 38.8 percent scored right at the mid-level; that is, they received two scores of 3, for a total of 6 on this trait.

Figure 1.



26% Strengths outweigh weaknesses
39% Balance
33% Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Let's examine what the notions of strength and weakness mean in light of what raters actually observed in student's papers.

Strengths

With respect to Ideas and Content, the stronger papers tended to be:

1. Focused and clear.
2. Interesting and fun to read.

3. Thoughtful--and sometimes thought-provoking as well.

4. Original--not necessarily unique with respect to the ideas or experiences related, but fresh in approach and insight.

5. Personalized, showing a strong sense of commitment.

6. Valid, revealing a "ring of truth" either from the student's experience or insight about life and human relationships.

7. Controlled and well handled.

8. Highly specific, backed by relevant examples.

Weaknesses

By contrast, the weaker papers tended to be:

1. Unfocused or unclear, often not hitting upon the main idea until the last line.

2. Disjointed or confused.

3. A laundry list of ideas, rather than one central idea well developed.

4. An expanded cliche--a rehash of ideas heard elsewhere.

5. Repetitive, relying on the prompt itself or on continual restatement of the writer's first-paragraph idea.

6. Shallow, lacking in insight.

7. Underdeveloped for the size of the assignment.

8. Overly general.

9. Inflated or insincere.

10. Inadequate, showing limited knowledge of the subject.

Examples

Weak

My friend's name is (name). He is my best friend because he likes almost everything I like, and hates almost everything I do too. We like to play handball alot. We usely egg alot of cars. He has to go to a different school than I do, but he comes over alot.

(Name) had an accident and was taken to the hospital. He had three broken bones in his chest, a broken arm, two broken legs, and a broken

skull. He was in cridacaul condition. He came out of the hospital with his parents but he looked like a mummy. I looked at him and I ran off faster than a speeding bullet, even a cannon. I never saw him again untill we were in the sematary sleeping six feet under the ground.

Mid-Level

My special friend is (name). She is my friend because I like to be with her. (Name) is a very sweet person, when I need help, she will help me. I enjoy her company because she has a good personality. I can have fun with her because she is a exciting person.

I value her friendship because she is a very helpful person, and I like her as a friend. Sometimes when I need some help on an assignment in Reading class, she will help me in anyway she can. I see (name) helping other people too. A lot of other people like her. (Name) is a friend forever.

That is why I value (name)'s friendship very much.

Strong

My best friend's name is (name). I met (name) in September when I went to the Little Ocean pet shop to sell them a pair of Alligator lizards. While there I found that the manager was very knowledgable in the field of herpetology. I was very glad to meet somone who shared an interest in reptiles.

Later, when grasshoppers got to be very scarce, I started to buy my lizard food from the Little Ocean, where I could get good advice from (name) as well as get a great deal because he always charged me for fifteen crickets when he actually gave me about twenty-five. he also sold me a fifty-five gallon aquarium for sixty-five dollars just because it had a leak in the seam. As if that was not enough, he has started a search (through wholesale dealers) for a rare lizard named Phelsumavinsoni to sell me at little above wholesale price.

(Name) has not only giv'en me a great deals and free advice, he has giv'en me an honest look into the pet trade and it's ways. I am very greatful to (name), for he has shown me not only how to be a good pet shop owner but also how to be a good human.

and

He was great, a one-of-a-kind guy. Stand-up, Church-going, humble, butt-kicking kind-of-a-guy, that (name), (name) with one 't', thank you very much. (Name), my brother, <u>blood</u>-brother that is. I knew him through fourth- and fifth-grade, when we lived in Gresham. He was a friend of a friend, and when we met, we just hit it off. We were best friends. We knew each other for only three months before we started acting like we'd known each other all our lives. Three months into the

fourth-grade before we decided we'd wanted to be blood-brothers, and were going to do it pretty much like the Indians had. So, we set it for the next Friday night, when I was staying the night at his house. Friday approached, and, finally arrived. At 11:45 pm., when all was quiet and his parents were asleep, we crept out to the hollow in the woods, just in back of (name)' house. With us, we took two candles, a small, stainless steel pen-knife, two large bottles of root-beer, and a small book of matches. We packed all of this in a small blanket. At 11:55 pm., we arrived at the hollow, and began setting up. We laid the blanket down and put the candles down into the moist dirt at both ends. At 11:55 pm. we started. First we did sort of a chant we wrote. It read: "I (name) do solemnly swear, body and soul, to defend my blood-brother and help him in time of need, and to keep him clean and good." We read this at the same time, and, when finished, shook right hands while putting the left on each other's shoulder. We then lit the candles. After that, we got on our knees in the middle of the blanket. First (name) used the pen-knife, then I. We both made a small incision in the middle finger of our right hands. A moment later, at midnight, we pressed our incisioned fingers together and let the blood flow into the other. At a minute past midnight we were brothers. We took out the root-beer and toasted each other and our newfound brotherhood. After that it seemed we had a mind link. We knew when the other was angry and didn't wish to converse with anyone. But again we knew when the other needed someone to talk to, if they were depressed or whatever. But we always just automatically knew when we saw each other. We never had to say a thing. We knew when we were around each other too much, when we needed a week or two with our other friends. Because of this, this way we realized we needed time off from one another, I think we were better friends than most. However, aside from being blood-brothers and American, we really didn't have that much in common. He liked the Beatles, I liked Hall & Oates. And while he was darker in skin and hair color, and a little shorter, too, I was sort of fair haired and light skinned, and a little taller than he. From our friendship, I know now what they mean by opposites attract.

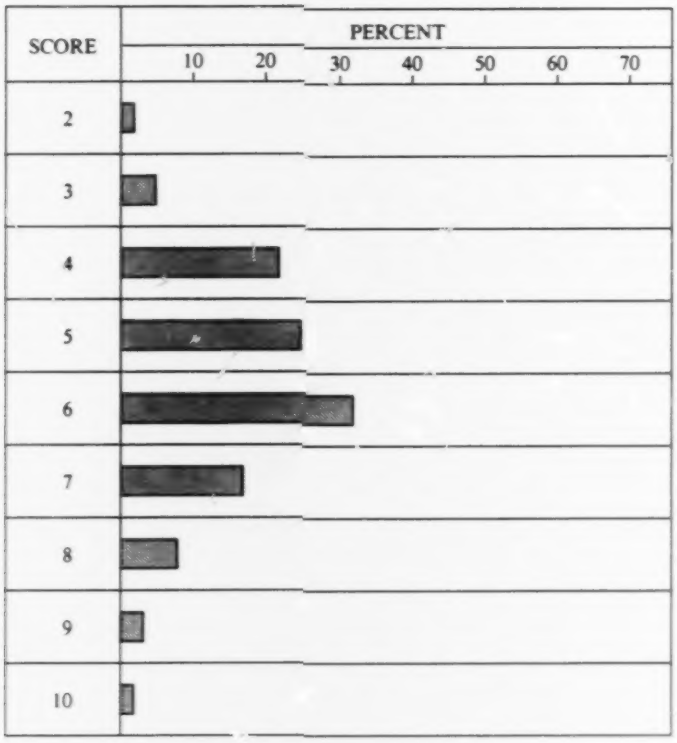
(Name) was the best kid I ever knew. There when I needed him, gone when he knew I needed to be alone. And I feel darn privileged of having the extreme honor of being his blood-brother. I just wish we could have carted him along with us when we moved here to Canby. God bless his soul.

I'm never going to forget him.

Trait 2: Organization and Development

The average score for eighth graders on the trait of Organization and Development was 5.5, slightly below the point where strengths and weaknesses are equal. Overall, this was the weakest area of performance statewide. Only 20 percent of the students tested showed more strengths than weaknesses in their writing with respect to this trait; nearly half--48.4 percent--revealed more weaknesses than strengths. And fewer than a third--28.8 percent scored at mid-level. See Figure 2 on the following page.

Figure 2.



20% Strengths outweigh weaknesses
29% Balance
49% Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Strengths

The stronger papers in Organization and Development tended to:

1. Have a strong opening.
2. Show logical progression (but not necessarily the standard five-paragraph essay unless that structure fit the student's approach and theme well).
3. Make use of every sentence; every sentence carried its own weight.
4. Make the main idea stand out (secondary ideas did not vie for attention).
5. Reflect a sense of order and balance.
6. Get to the heart of things (the writer did not dwell on trivia).

7. Make appropriate, but not excessive, use of transitions.

8. Stop when the writer had nothing more to say.

9. Conclude effectively.

10. Reveal the main point through examples, rather than generalizations or statements of feelings.

11. Provide sufficie . support to carry every main idea through.

Weaknesses

By contrast, the weaker papers in Organization and Development tended to:

1. Not begin at the best place--or even a sensible place.

2. Insert too much up-front detail before getting to the point.

3. Use too much "interruptive information"--extraneous, irrelevant detail.

4. Bury the main idea amid secondary ideas or generalizations.

5. Start an idea but never complete it or flesh it out.

6. Show excessive repetition, with one idea repeated 2, 3 or even more times.

7. Start nowhere and go nowhere.

8. Conclude weakly or abruptly, often stopping at random or just repeating the introduction in slightly different words.

9. Go off on a philosophical tangent, sometimes preaching to the reader about the value of friendship in general, rather than discussing a particular friend.

Examples

Weak

I once had a really nice, friend his name was (name)d We shared lots of things together he was really special to me. My family liked him as much as I did he never cused at people. Me and him really had a blast togethe I had known him for five years, ever science second grade. My mom liked him alot she wouldnt mind him coming over after school and to stay the night as long as i wasn't in trouble I had to move that was a bad time for me. If we didn't have to move I would be more happy than I am now one thing that we had In common Is that we were both Italian. Me and my family had alot in common with his family. We both had a good lifestyle.

We were Pretty good at school I suppose he was the smartest kid I knew he got a 4.00 pt grade average every report card.

We both spend money and had a goood time together know what I said Im going to have to move I said (name) his family came over the last night before we left and said goodby to us before we left now that i dont see him anymore it makes me really sad I miss him alot and I now he misses me too, We were good friends and It didn't have too end like that. Making me move Is not going to stop my relationship with my best friend (name), He is Important to me because we shared alot of things with each other If you have a friend like him treat him nice dont be a dirty friend like I use to. I hope sometime I can meet another friend like him Sometime and if i do I will never treat anyone bad again. We use to go fishing he lived by a lake I lived by a lake to but they called it a beach, he lived one mile away from me thats not very far but never treat a friend bad.

Mid-Level

(Note the overuse of transitions.)

My special friend would be (name). The reason this person is, because he has been enjoyable company. Another reason would be hes nice to me all of the time. Also we've only known each other for almost 2 years. Secondly my parents enjoy having him at my house. Evenmore we look like each other in certain ways. At least thats what his mom said. Next we have many things in common like, looks, run fast, good in sports and other things. Another thing about it is we get along with each other most of the time. One of the reasons we get along is because we have things to talk about. Also theres another thing weird about us were the same size. We also like the same people. Secondly we both like the same girl's. Next a whole bunch of girls like us to. (Name) has curly hair like I do, but mying is curlier. Almost everything he likes I like sometimes. We also like the same kind of food. We hate the same things to like, onions, raisins, golf, long trips and lots other things. We both have sisters older than us. We both like the same teachers and hate the same ones. We do everything the same except think the same.

Strong

(Notice how the theme of color ties things together.)

While I was in third grade, I had a friend named (name). (Name) was my best frind because he thought that I was neat while others disliked me. (Name) and I were very close, while in school, we had lunch together and many of our clases were during the same period. I really liked (name), and he liked me.

(Name) was a special friend to me in many ways, first, he would always be smiling and would always want me to play with him, eveh while the other kids would tease and make fun of me. (Name) didn't care, he just wanted to play, so we played.

When I first met (name), I thought he looked funny. He always wore something orange, either his jacket, or his pants, or or his shoes. The day that (name) wore those orange and white shoes, was the day that our friendship began.

(Name) had been teased about his shoes all day and now he didn't want to talk to anyone, not even the teachers. (Name) was sad, but at the end of the day he still had a smile. When I asked (name) why he was smiling while everyone had teased him he said, "Because I'm different, and they know it!" When I told (name) that I liked his shoes, that was the beggining of our friendship. From that day on, (name) was my friend and I was his.

(Name) and I did everything together, even go to each others house. by the middle of the school year (name) was beginning to act like me, and I considered him part of me. We were always together, no matter where we were. After school we would go through the woods to his house for butter and jelly sandwiches and orange kool-aid. (Name) and I were acting like each other, but he didn't stop wearing orange, and I never wore it.

(Name) was living with one parent, his mother. I liked her, she would always come outside and make sure that we had enough cookies. (Name)'s mom loved to bake cookies, and she baked the best oatmeal cookies I ever had.

After school was out, (name)'s mom got a letter. It said that (name)'s father was going to court to try to get custody of (name), but (name) didn't know about it.

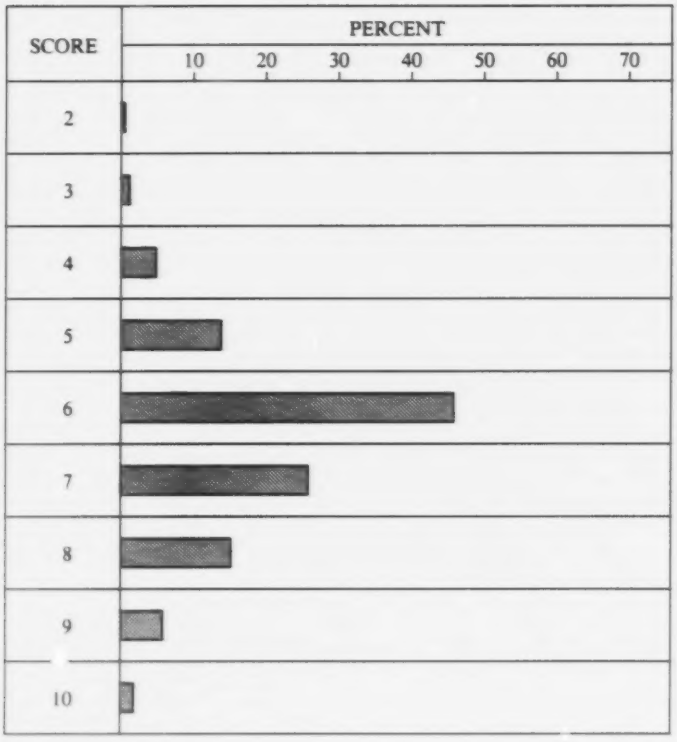
One Saturday whil I was over at (name)'s house, his mother told him that he would have to watch the house while she ran some errands. She let me stay. When (name)'s mother returned two hours later, she looked like she was crying. She had lost the battle. (Name)'s father had more money than his mother and spent more time at home where he worked. But (name)'s mother wanted another hearing, and she got one. (Name)'s mother lost that hearing too, but was awarded visitation rights on weekends.

That Saturday was the saddest I ever had. I was loosing a friend, and a part of myself. I couldn't stop it, so I cride. I waved to (name) as he drifted off in his dad's pickup bed. But he didn't look the same, he was crying, but worse yet, he wasn't wearing any orange. He had changed, he shouldn't have to be with his father, he didn't belong there. He was someone special before, now he was just another closed case.

Trait 3: Style

The average performance of eighth graders on this trait was 6.4, indicating that many students received scores of 4 and 5 on this trait. In fact, this was the highest area of performance for the 1985 writing assessment. Fully 37.7 percent of the students tested revealed more strengths than weaknesses in their writing with respect to this trait; only 15.4 percent revealed more weaknesses than strengths. And 44 percent scored at the mid-level. See folowing page for Figure 3.

Figure 3.



38% Strengths outweigh weaknesses
44% Balance
16% Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Strengths

With respect to the trait of Style, the stronger papers tended to be:

1. Personal, highly individual--a strong paper in this category truly stood out from the others.

2. Communicative, speaking directly to the reader.

3. Sincere and earnest, as if the writer cared deeply about getting the point across.

4. Honest, even at the risk of revealing the writer.

5. Stylistically different, showing the student's willingness to take a chance on trying something new or unusual.

6. Appealing. Often the reader was truly captivated and sorry to have the paper end.

7. Understanding of the audience, never condescending or remote, but seeming to judge very accurately what adult readers wanted and needed to be told.

8. Natural.

9. Capable of evoking a mood or feeling.

Weaknesses

The weaker papers tended to:

1. Rely heavily on generalities, thus producing the "safe" paper intended to offend no one.

2. Remain on the surface, never seeming to divulge the writer's true feelings.

3. Hide behind a mask of expanded cliches, or sometimes vulgarities intended to shock rather than entertain or inform.

4. Be repetitive, bland or flat.

5. Sound overstated, preposterous, pretentious or even downright false.

6. Be inconsistent, as if the writer couldn't decide whether to produce a formal essay or just chat.

7. Use an inappropriate tone, sometimes immature for grade level, sometimes insolent or wholly indifferent.

8. Use diction inappropriate to the topic.

9. Misjudge the needs and interests of an adult audience.

Examples

Weak

Here is a person that like the same things as I do. His name is (name).

If theres nothing to do around the house. He a person who I can phone and talk too. Its fun to be around him to do things. We mostly do things everyday.

Mid-Level

My best, most caring, and most loyal friend is (name). She is always there when I need her, and we always have fun together. With (name) I never run out of things to say, like I do with my other friends.

(Name) and I have done many things together, and have shared many laughs. We enjoy doing the same things, and we enjoy working together on school projects.

(Name) is a super friend to have, because she cares about other people's feelings. Whenever anybody puts down someone else, (name) sticks by them, and she helps them feel better about themselves, she never criticizes anybody, but tries to help them.

Another thing I like about (name), is that we always make a good team, because we work well together. All the teachers seem to like us, and they have us do everything for them. It seems that people are jealous of us for that.

(Name) is very smart also. She and I are both officers in Honor Society, we both are in Algebra, and we are in Honor's English. Whenever I'm having trouble with anything, (name)'s there ready to help.

(Name) is also truthful and loyal. She never lies, and says it is easier to tell the truth. Whenever I tell her anything, I can trust her not to tell anyone. I'm happy that I have a friend that I can confide in, and tell my innermost thoughts to.

I'm glad that I have such an understanding, caring, and loyal friend as (Name), and I hope we can stay friends for life.

Strong

I am not going to write about a sexy chick that I want to meet in the future. I am going to write about a friend I have now. His name is (name) I will not describe him physically, because that is unimportant. What is important is that I describe him mentally, which is what I shall do.

(Name) and I are mental twins. What I mean is that we think almost alike. We have sort of a mental link which allows us to do this. This 'mental link' is not one of those psycho things you hear about in Stephen King novels. We have known each other for so long that we simply began to think alike.

We are completely compatible. Whatever (name) likes, I like. Whoever I hate, (name) hates. We share the same hobbies, and often do them together. We also have our illusions of grandeur. In fifth grade we planned on buying a yacht, getting marriead to our girl-friends, buying lots of food, and sailing to California. Once we invented a "wonder-drug" which made the taker live for the rest of his life. (It really worked!) We were planning to market it for 99$ a pill. We were also planning on (name) winning $5000 so we could make our spy movie. We had the screenplay written, the actors chosen, and we were ready to go. Unfortunately, (name) had only won a ball-point pen, so we went into the jewelry business. We took broken Pepsi bottles and pounded chips off them until they were beautiful. These were diamonds. We found 7-Up bottles made good emeralds, and beer bottles were good opals. Once in a while we would find some blue glass, which made good aquamarines.

Next year we will go to Benson Polytechnic High School, where we will build strike-helicopters in shop class to attack the Soviets with.

and

I don't get along with people to good, and sometimes I am alone for a long time. When I am alone, I like to walk to Forests and places where only me and the animals are. My best friend is God, but when I don't believe he's around sometime's, My dog stands in. We do everything together. Hunt, fish, walk, eat and sleep together. My dog's name is Fox, 'cause he looks like an Artic Fox. Fox and I used to live in this house with a pond behind. That pond was our property. The only thing allowed on it (that was allowed) was ducks & fish. If another person or dog would even look like going near that place, Fox and I would run them off in a Frenzy. There was a lot of rocks around, so I would build Forts & traps for any body even daring to come near. The pond had a bridge that was shaded by willows, so on a hot day me and Fox would sit on that bridge & soak our feet, well, I would soak me feet, Fox just kinda jumped in.

At night, the pond was alive with frogs, so I would invite this kid over, (he was a guy like me) and catch frogs. After we had a couple each, we would pick the best looking one out of our group & race them. The winner gets the other guys frog.

In the winter, the pond would freeze over, and I got my ice skates out. The pond was now an ice skating rink. Fox would chase me as I went round & round the pond.

After about a year, I was riding my bike patroling the area around the pond. With Fox at my side, I raced downhill toward the pond. I tried to stop, but my back tire went into a skid. I went face first into murky, shadowy waters, when I went down, a minute later I felt something pull on my shirt, I grabbed it, not know what to think, When I hit the surface, I saw that it was Fox, pulling on my shirt as if he was trying to save me. He was to little to save me if I was really drowning, but it was the thought that counts. I owe him one.

Another year passed. One day my mom got home from the store, and she bought me a rubber raft. I was just a cheap one. but it was mine. I blew it up with a tire pump. It was just the right size for me & Fox. Out of respect for Fox, I named it the USS Fox & christened it right in the pond.

On sunny days, I would take the raft out & lay in the sun with Fox on my legs.

One day, when I was asleep in the raft, the wind blew pretty hard and blew my raft right into a bunch of sticks and rocks, the USS Fox was given a sad salute, and then was no more.

Another year passed, and this would be our last year by the pond. I admired & respected that pond more than I ever did that year. But, at long last, all good things most come to an end, we moved to another town. Fox & I still visit the pond, but it'll never be like them 3 years when she was mine.

Trait 4: Word Choice

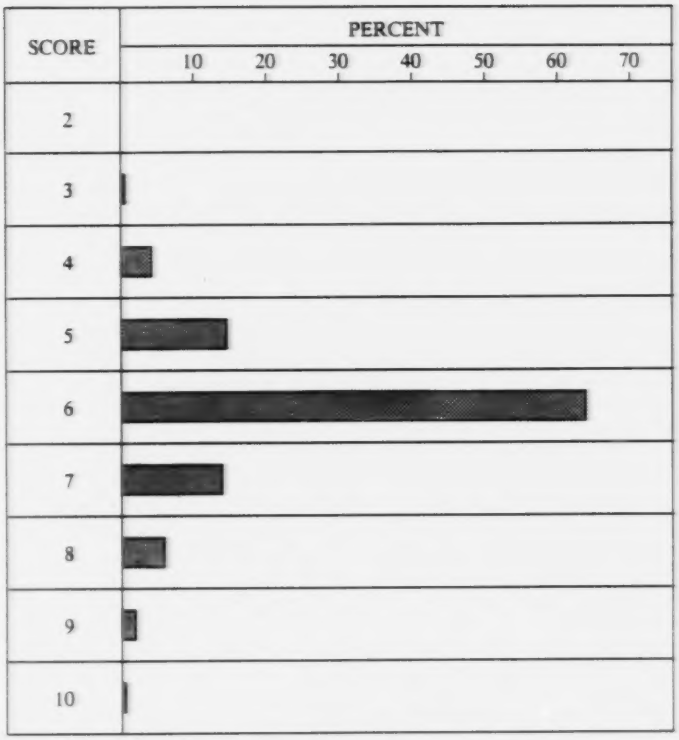
Students' average performance statewide on the trait of Word Choice was 6.1, just slightly above the level where strengths and weaknesses balance. On this trait, however, only 19.5 percent of the students demonstrated more strengths than weaknesses in their writing, and only 15.8 percent revealed more weaknesses than strengths. In other words, nearly two-thirds of all the students tested were precisely at the mid-level on this trait; it was the only one of the six to reflect such a score pattern. Only .4 percent of the students tested received a score of 10 on Word Choice (two 5's, in other words), and fewer than .1 percent of those tested received a 2 (two 1's, in other words). Students who scored at mid-level on this trait tended to choose words that were essentially correct and that conveyed meaning adequately, but the language tended to be trite, flat and ordinary. Such papers were not visually strong, nor was there anything unusual, exciting, or appealing in the way words were used. For a more complete description, refer to the scoring guide once again.

Strengths

The stronger papers with respect to Word Choice were characterized by:

1. A good vocabulary--meaning not esoteric language or the use of words to impress the reader, but the use of the right word at the right time.
2. Precision and a sense of appreciation for the sound and rhythm of words.
3. Greater reliance on specific, concrete nouns and energetic verbs than on long strings of adjectives or adverbs.
4. Avoidance of cliches or jargon.
5. Avoidance of monotonous repetition.
6. Little reliance on the "easy phrase," the first thing to come to mind--a real effort to stretch, to find the better way to say it.
7. Vivid imagery that puts the reader right at the scene.
8. Originality, an ability to make the reader see the power of everyday words through a fresh twist.
9. Ordinary words used in delightful ways.
10. Naturalness--the reader felt this was the way the writer would really tell it if they conversed together.
11. Simple expressiveness.
12. Rich language.

Figure 4.



20% Strengths outweigh weaknesses
62% Balance
16% Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Weaknesses

By contrast, the weaker papers with respect to Word Choice were characterized by:

1. Repetition.
2. Reliance on cliches.
3. A weak or sometimes forced vocabulary (almost as if the student had looked up every other word in a thesaurus).
4. Over-reliance on abstract words and generalities that made the student's real thoughts and feelings difficult to abstract.
5. Carelessness in the use of language.

6. Overuse of words and phrases such as:

   - fun (a fun person, real fun guy, so fun, very fun)
   - nice (real nice, so nice, nice to know)
   - great (great time, great personality, a great friend)
   - awesome (an awesome friend, awesome time, awesome experience)
   - neat (what a neat person she/he was)
   - stuff (we took algebra and all that stuff)
   - massive (we had a massive time, invited massive friends over)
   - always there for me (he/she was always there for me)
   - sweet (she was sweet, so sweet, very sweet)
   - helpful (she/he was always helpful and really helped me)

Examples

Weak

(Name) was a good friend because he was nice, he liked things I liked, and was fun to be with. He was a real good friend. We were always together.

(Name) was a nice person to me. He would always share everything with me like his money, food, and clothers. Also I would share everything with him.

We both liked everything the same. Both of us liked riding downtown, going to the falls, and (name). Also we liked cycle riding, and dirt bike riding. We went everywhere together.

He was really fun to be with all the time. I always liked his sense of humor. We really into fine foods like Taco Bell and Dairy Queen. Both of us liked staying up late and eating till we were dissy.

Mid-Level

(Notice the strained vocabulary here, which does not work in the way the writers intended, though the effort to communicate is considerable.)

I have a friend that is very valuable to me. We have be friends since we were in kindergarten together. We are the same in many ways. We both love to eat oatmeal, we both enjoy riding horses, and we both like to just sit and enjoy the company of each other.

We are alike also. She sits with her dark mane of hair cascading gracefully down to her shoulders while I tower over her fragile body with my chestnut locks bouncing wildly on my had. Her dark complexion accenting her soft facial features makes me, with my fair skin tone and bold features, look like a plastic doll as she looks as pure as undisturbed china. She is a delicate flower dancing on the wind. I am a tree trying to stand through the storm.

When I say we are alike, I don't mean in physical form. I mean in heart and beliefs. In friendship, that's what counts mostly.

I remember once as I sat crying because she had pronounced another as her dearest freind. I ached from deeper within myself than ever before. my soul was screaming and rippining in pain, my heart was weeping with sadness, and my brain was in total confusion. then, she came to me and asked why I was hurting so badly. I cried to her my long awaited question. I asked her why she had discarded me as a tissue filled with tears.

Her reply was total shock. She told ;me that she did not know that it was she that hurt me so badly. She calmly told me that she had not discarded our friendship, she only blossomed a new one. She told me that no new friendship could break our bond of trust and love. She said that I was not replacable by anyone. She said she thought I knew.

After then, I did know. I was joyous in heart and soul afterwards. The hurt I felt during that small moment of doubt told me that I would not be complete without her. Her innocent laugh brightens my day. Her glowing smile warms my heart. Her faithful ear that is always open to me makes her the best friend anyone could ever have. I feel very complete with her near me. She cheers me up when I am sad, she laughs at my corny jokes, she gives me her honest opinion. She is my best friend and my best critic.

We see each other during the summer because she has moved away. I was sad at first, but we keep in close touch and she visits often. Other friends write to each other, but the letters slow to an end. We know that won't happen to us because I need her and she needs me. We need each other.

We have a special friendship . . . (name) and I.

and

My friend (name) is a real fun person. The reason I say this is because we have been best friends for at least seven yrs., so we know a lot about each other. We always do more things together than we do with our other friends. I must say she is my best friend.

We like to go skating in the summer. We like doing this because there are a lot of other friend's there. We really get inured when we skate.

We are always prudent before we do things and always try to do things just right. We try to be fluent and respective so we can get across to each other on what we are talking about. Actually I think our friendship is very lucrative. She is very gingerly when talking to other people, so they may not get angry.

She would never divulge about me and never has. Sometimes we mimic each other, yet not often. Some things she likes are totally different than what I like. Sometimes things get very complicating though when trying to explain something.

We eat a lot of food but we never gorge food down at each others houses. We are also very suave to each others parents and use a lot of mannerism. Our houses are enclosed with large fences. Both of us get into a lot of financial situations and have to borrow money from each other.

There is always chaos in what we are doing. Like when I was making pudding she said I added to much milk and stuff like that. She is a most memorable friend I think She's alway trying to be so prim. Our friendship will never detract our lives. We always try to have legible handwriting when we do our homework because we figure we will get a better grade on our work.

It is very hard to talke about this subject because your have to think hard about what your going to write next. I like (name) a lot because she is a very honest friend. I hope our friendship never fall apart. I must definatly say she definatly is a fun person and a real good friend.

Strong

(In particular, notice the last paragraph.)

I have a friend who is totally unique. He is smart, funny, responsible, trustworthy and caring. He can look at a situation I'm in and say correctly to himself either "Boy, I'd better take this seriously," or "I think I'll lighten up the situation and make (name) laugh." He's one of those people who no matter how mad, and or depressed you are can make you laugh and feel better.

I often wish I had some of his traits and abilities, such as patience, non-procrastination, and being able to make half-court shots during lunchtime basketball games. I also wish I was as tall as or taller than him, even though I will probably be taller than he is now when I am his age.

Even though I'm two years younger than him, he treats me as an equal and not as a little brat. He is receptive to my ideas and feelings, and does not mind explaining things to me unless they're blindingly obvious.

He also helps to bolster my responsibility and is nullifying my problem with procrastination. When I forget a pen, he does'nt loan me one but instead makes me ask the teacher for one. Unlike many, I don't consider this unfriendly; I consider it a favor. When I wait until two nights before a 100,-point social studies project is due to start working on it, the only consolation he gives me is that I've been getting my algebra homework done. I value this in that it encourages me to do my homework ahead of time, like he does.

My friend has an incredible amount of patience, unlike me. I sometimes get sick of one 11-year-old sister, while he has 7-year-old triplet sisters who he always manages to put up with.

I also wish I had his ability to make jokes. I don't know how to make good jokes, but I can certainly laugh heartily at them.

He is also trustworthy. I entrust him with things I'd probably not even tell my parents. I know he won't tell anyone and that if he's backed into a corner concerning a question about me, he'll come up with a plausible answer.

My friend is a sort of year-round Christmas wishbook of characteristics I want but will never have. My friend is a sort of god to me, and I've placed him on the highest pedestal possible. My friend is great. My friend is (name).

During the scoring session, the raters were delighted by one particularly insightful paper which, in its eloquent postscript, fully captured the philosophy and spirit of the assessment with respect to Word Choice. It is reprinted here for the sake of its very important message to us all. (The postscript was considered in the final ratings.)

My Special Friend

My friend is a person who I relate to very well. His name is (name), he was born January 23, 1971, witch is the same data I was born. We have been friends since four and have been many places together (Canada, California). We enjoy each others companionship and share many of the same sports. Mike and I are very close and dread the day we must go our seperate ways.

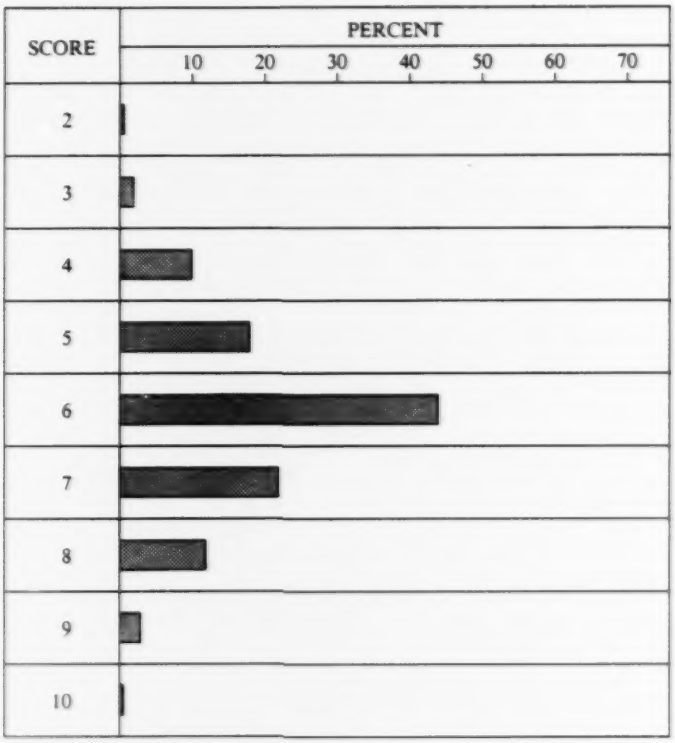
P.S. When we were told to write this they told us to "use the biggest and most complexed words we could". Thats not the way I talk, and shurely not the way I would describe my friendship. So I wrote my true feelings and hope that's what you grade and not the way we use the complicated words.

Sincerely,
(Name)

Trait 5: Syntax and Sentence Structure

The average score on this trait was 6.2, again revealing just slightly more strengths than weaknesses. Of those students tested, 41.9 percent scored in the mid-range. About a third--32.1 percent--revealed more strengths than weaknesses on this trait; and only 23.3 percent revealed more weaknesses than strengths. See Figure 5 on the following page.

Figure 5.



33% Strengths outweigh weaknesses
42% Balance
24% Weaknesses outweigh strengths

Strengths

With respect to Syntax/Sentence Structure, the stronger papers tended to:

1. Be grammatically correct.
2. Sound fluent--easy on the ear--when read aloud.
3. Show some awareness of language rhythms and patterns (e.g., use of alliteration).
4. Contain sentences that were varied in structure and length.
5. Contain no "filler" sentences. Transitions were so smooth that the reader was hardly aware of them, and one sentence truly took over where the preceding sentence left off.

6. Make stylistically effective use of fragments and run-ons, if these devices were used at all.

7. Show enough sense of control to suggest that the writer might have chosen some other way to express an idea--but chose this way deliberately.

8. Be extremely easy to read.

Weaknesses

The weaker papers, by contrast, tended to:

1. Contain grammatical errors.

2. Lack fluency.

3. Sound disjointed, awkward or rambling.

4. Be difficult to read aloud.

5. Wander purposelessly from sentence to sentence; often it was difficult to tell where one sentence stopped and the next began.

6. Show little knowledge of end punctuation.

7. Contain many short, choppy sentences--or one long sentence unpunctuated.

8. Make repeated use of monotonous sentence patterns (subject-verb or subject-verb-object).

9. Require rereading.

Examples

Weak

My best friend (name) Well we've been friends for a long time now you know evry Since fith grade or longer. We've got into an fite befor. But it Was'ent nothing Serious thou you know. just a little mad's that's all but acording to that thow we haven't gotton in any other fihght so far. But any way.

This friends name is (name). And Why She is important to me is becaus she is a nice person. that I've amiyerd for an long time and I what to bee able to see her agian and tell her how much I car for her. And Why I Vallu her is becaus it just happen that way one day you know. But as for now I don't know were she is and I haven't been right Sience I've haven't seen her. for all I know she might be in Wasington or Some were els. But were ever She is I hope to see her again Some day.

Mid-Level

(Notice that this paper is very weak in the trait of Organization and Development, though it scored at mid-level on other traits, including Syntax/Sentence Structure.)

My Friend

My friend's name is (name). This friend is a very special friend. We've been best buds since the first grade. She was born in 1971, she is 13 right now. (Name) lives in warm springs on sidwalter flats. We run around together. I relly like to be around her because she's fund to be with and we have alot in common. She's nice to almost everyone, so everyone is nice to her. (Name) never talks behind anyone's back except when she doesn't like them. She's same tall as me so I like her even more. (Name) is nickname I gave her. When I tell (name) a secret, espicially a private one, it never gets around the school. She's the only one I can really trust. (Name) has first lunch so we can go outside and play football or something. When its an inside day, we play dodgeball or whatever there is to play. we play it together. Some of her friends I don't approve of, but she doesn't get mad at me because of it. (Name) is not as smart as I am but she's really fun to be with. She is the same fast as me. If I beat her she almost never gets mad. She is always cheerful or funny, wierd and crazy, unless someone teases her about someone or something she doesn't want to be teased about. Sometimes she does stuff kinds our age shouldn't do, so I try to help her stop. She likes gum and candy so much that she eats that instead of her meals. I really don't know what she likes to drink because I never really see her drink anything but water. (Name) wears nice clothes and her parents are well-off but strict, so she never gets to do much of anything. (Name) has lots of friends and she has a boy friend named (name). She had 3 other boyfriends this year. In 7th grade went to a cascade school. I was trying to talk her into joining track this year but she wouldn't listen. She's very fast and would probably win alot of races. She could probably beat me if she tried. last year she was in gymnastics but I never got to see her at any of the meets, I was in gymnastics, too. She lived in warm springs since she was born.

Strong

(Notice particularly the sentence variety; you can appreciate it best if you take time to read the paper aloud.)

A Special Friend

Last week I was looking for a shoe when I cam across a dusty picture. It was of my best friend, (name) whom I met in Germany while stationed there with the army. He was the best friend I ever had, and everybody should have someone just like him.

At first we seemed incompatable, as we were almost total opposites. I am thin, he is heavyset. My hair is light, his dark. I lived in a house all my life in Oregon, whereas he was moving every four years. Also, he was brought up in a southern military family, so we didn't even talk alike.

But, as time wore on, what with us living right on top of each other in housing, we became inseperable. We started acting, walking, and even talking like each other. We rarely went anywhere without the other, except on family vacations. If one of us went to a movie, you could expect to see the other in the seat right beside. We had our fair share of fights, all right, but always we made up.

I guess what made me like him so much was his ability to come up with off the wall ideas, some of the strangest and funniest you would or could imagine. Like duct taping the bathroom door shut while his brother was in there or giving out free lemonade in the middle of summer at a baseball game, then locking the restroom doors shut. Or sneaking out at night climbing up the drainpipe, knocking on the window and asking if I wanted to take a walk. (I did of course). We had a great time until it was time to go home and we discovered that our windows had been shut by the breeze. We had a heck of a time explaining that one to our parents.

Even as I write this paper, I retain some of the qualities and behaviors typical to him. (Not all of them good) I still talk like him, to some extent, but I wish I could hear the real McCoy. I never told him how much he meant to me, and if I had the chance again, I would tell him right off the bat, so as not to miss this chance again.

I live in my old house now, and it was a sad day when I left there. We exchanged addresses and promised to write, but I'm the only one who has kept that promise. I haven't recieved a single reply to one of my 9 or 10 letters. So I go on wondering what happened to the best friend that ever lived.

Trait 6: Conventions

Average performance statewide on this trait was 6.1, just a shade above the mid-level. About a third of the students tested--32.2 percent--scored right at the mid-level. For more than a third--35.8 percent--strengths outweighed weaknesses in Conventions. And for fewer than a third--29.1 percent--weakness outweighed strengths. Twelve and one-half percent of the students tested received a total score of 8 (two 4's) on this trait, 3.2 percent receive 9's (one 5, one 4), and 1.3 percent received 10's (two 5's)--the highest percentages of students to receive top ratings on any trait. See Figure 6 on the following page.

The trait of Conventions covers grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling and paragraphing. In reviewing students' writing, raters did not count errors or make marks of any kind on the papers. There are several reasons for this:

1. Marks made by one rater on the paper inevitably bias other rates who review the paper.

2. Counting errors is extremely time consuming, and can literally double the cost of the assessment.

3. It is virtually impossible to achieve high inter-rater consistency regarding the specific number of errors present in a piece of writing because raters do not share the same priorities (one attends closely to spelling, another to

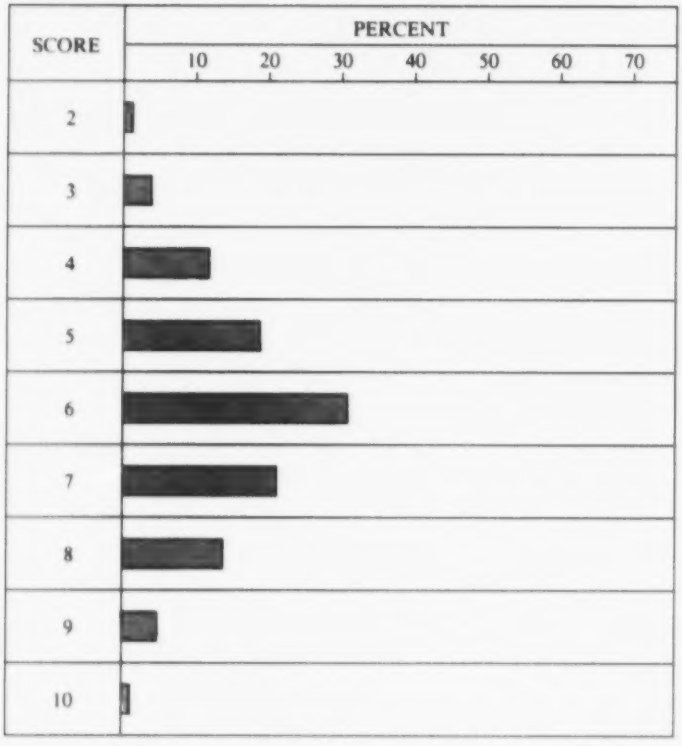
punctuation, and so on), and do not always agree (not even the most up-to-date English handbooks always agree) on what is correct or acceptable.

4. In order to achieve fairness with error counts, one must also count the number of words in each student's paper. Otherwise, a student who writes three pages, and has more opportunity to make errors, will tend to be penalized in comparison to the student who writes only a short paragraph and has little opportunity for error.

5. Error-count approaches tend to penalize the student who takes a risk. For example, suppose two students are writing in response to the same task, and neither knows how to use quotation marks correctly--but one attempts it and the other doesn't. One student will have "errors" for trying something a bit beyond her/his control. The other student's paper will not show that error, but the level of attempt will be less.

6. Most important (practical considerations aside), there is no substantive evidence to support the theory that counting and marking errors on a student's paper will improve that student's writing.

Figure 6.



237 Strengths outweigh weaknesses
32% Balance
30% Weaknesses outweigh strengths

In this assessment, therefore, Conventions were scored as a function of readability. That is to say, at the 5 level, it was necessary that conventions actually enhance readability. The paper was not only essentially correct (though it did not have to be flawless), but it was smoothly coordinated and easy to get through.

At the 3 level, problems with conventions began to impair readability. It was still relatively easy to decipher meaning, but an occasional sentence might require rereading, or an occasional misspelled word might need to be sounded out before it could be identified. In general, the reader could move along at a fairly fast--if bumpy--pace.

At the 1 level, errors were so abundant that the paper was truly difficult to read. Virtually every sentence required rereading or slow going. Pauses were frequent, and some words might be hard to identify even with careful scrutiny.

Note: Handwriting was NOT a factor here. That is, a paper with very poor handwriting might be difficult to read, but if the conventions were well handled (and this was often the case), the paper was not scored down.

Papers that were essentially correct, but showed only a very modest level of attempt (e.g., no quotation marks, no complex or compound sentences, no variety in end punctuation--periods only) generally received 4s. One could not fairly say that errors impaired readability; they did not. Yet it was the consensus of the group that such a paper did not merit as high a score as the paper in which the writer attempted more difficult constructions and generally succeeded.

A Message to the Reader

Papers that were flawless mechanically were not necessarily strong papers in other respects. It often happened that a paper which received very high scores on Conventions tended to be rather weak in Ideas and Content and in Style. Similarly, papers that were very strong in Ideas and Content and in Style were not necessarily strong in Conventions. It is important to be aware of such differences in interpreting the data. Typically, such differences will not be made clear in holistic scoring. And in fact, a mechanically flawless paper may have a strong advantage in a holistic system because it tends to create a positive first impression that may bias the reader's view about the quality of the paper as a whole. On the other hand, a mechanically flawed paper may negatively bias a reader in much the same way. One of the primary advantages in analytical scoring is its capacity to identify for us the positive-negative contrasts within each paper, reminding us that a writer who does one thing very well will not necessarily (though she/he may) do everything well.

The following paper is reprinted to illustrate the striking difference that can occur between Conventions on the one hand (which are very weak in this case), and Ideas and Content (strong) and Style (strong) on the other.

When I first meat (name) my feonsay He and a frind (name) got up on the bleacers and sang happy birthday to her. On November 14 she got all embarast it was a lot of fun whaching her turn red. 15 days later on the 29th at a football game I asked her to go whith me she sead yes. She was real exseyted when I asked her. (Name) is real special to me because of her atatude twards thing these all sound jugments she dont go off doing things unless she thinks about it first. her atatude in class is real strong shes deturmin to get the work done.

(Name) is real preaty girl. Shes a little one about "5 3". But seyes dont mater she makes up for it in her personality. She is quit the carricter with jokes. her sense of humor is great thats what I like a great sence of humor.

(Name) and I have been going with echother for about 4 1/2 months and I love it. Because its dynomyte being around her. A month after me and (name) first whent together I got her a couple of roses. It was a aniversery for us so I got her some roses. (Name) liked the roses so much that she dint liet them out of her syet all day. She was so quit carring around them roses all day. I really got a kick out of it.

He and (name) have broke up one time and that dint last for 3 periods. I had her bake at the ends the day. We were just arguin now that it is going on 5 months things count be beter. (name) is really sweat and kind to me so I treat her reall good. I have the atmost respect for her. And the family, thes mom and dad are real good natcheral people thas why (name) is such a sweaty.

(name) has a lot of frind, boy she really likes to talk to me. She talks my leg off on the phone. I love to talk to her because she really has a perty voice I could talk to her all day. I think she could sing real good if she wanted to. Some of my freinds think the same thing.

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Additional Examples

Weak

(Name) he is a basket ball play he is from brokings he came down to play in a turmint whit his team. After ther game was over ther choc came over to our coch and told us ou we hade. I got (name) he came over to my house we wached a game ate denner and went to bead we tlaked and went to sleep. The next moring we got up ate got all of his stof and went to town tha played ther ferst game agenst us and thay lost. Thay got on the bus and went home.

The End

Mid-Level

My Best friend, (Name), (Name) my best friend, she is great, she is 5 foot 5 inches, Sandy Brown hair and green eyes, she is not fat at all. We are Best friends because we have so much in common, we both have all the same classes togather.

I value (Name) friendship because we get along great, and understand each others friendship and feelings What makes (Name) friend ship so important to me is that she is a very understanding person. and very easy get along with. that is once you get to know her as well as I do. We wernt really good friends until our classes changed and we had each other everyclass. and then we hit it off great After we found out more about each other. We both really didnt know if we could trust each other in the beginning but we both found out that we were both vary dependable and then we just happened to become best friends.

Our taste, I think (name) has very good tast. Because it is exactly like mine. We both have the same taste in guys, the guys with all the Big muscles, and good looking tans when weare togather we like to look good and make good impressions on other people. So we have the same taste in cloths, we wouldnt Be caught dead in some of those preppie cloths jeans and tee-shirts or sweaters all the way. we are always teasing each other about things like that. we both have the same taste in music. Soft Rock is our choice, we like groups like Chigo, prince, Madonna, cyndi laiper. But Prince is our favorite, We dont like Boy george or his Band "Culture Club" or onigo Bonigo, I never thought I'd Be Best friend with (name) But I'm sure glad we are

Strong

(The following two sample papers scored high on all traits, though that was not true of all papers that scored high on Conventions.)

About 6 years ago when I was in the second grade, a boy and his mother walked into the classroom. The mother looked to be in her mid-thirties. She had curly, light brown hair that was a little on the greasy side.

She was middly fat. She wore a ragged, dingy looking pancho, dirty jeans and sandals. By her appearance you could tell that they didn't have very much money. Her boy had shoulder length, black, somewhat grimy hair. He wore a dark blue T-shirt and jeans. To our suprise he also wore a mean looking pair of logging boots.

At once I knew we would be great friends. His name was (name). His nickname was (name). now (name) was a big boy. He stood at least 8 inches taller than me and the rest of the guys. His shoulders were broad and heavily muscled. He wasn't fat at all. You might call him husky. (Name) looked like a very powerful boy. The teacher asked someone to show him around. I volunteered immediately.

That day when I got home from school I walked up to the store and guess who I saw. (Name)! It turned out that he lived nearby. A little later in the week, after (name) had been at my house for a while, he invited me to his house on Saturday. Of course I accepted and he gave me directions on how to get there.

He said "You go 'cross the bridge, turn left and go to the top of the hill. Go until you get to the rock pit. Then you'll see two stumps. You go in 'tween of 'em and follow the trail 'till you get to the cabin."

The big day came and I left early in the morning. I jumped on my bike and went across the bridge and turned left. I laboriously pedaled to the top of a huge hill. I rode on a ways and came to the rock pit. There were the two huge, gnarled stumps. I went between them and found the steep trail. I started to push my bike up it. Tin minutes later I was huffing along when I looked up the trail and saw (name)'s mom. She saw me and started to laugh.

"You expected to push that bike all the way up this trail? HA!" She stated jovially, "Just drop it right there and go on up the trail. Aint nobody gonna steal it up here."

"Yes ma'am." I said gladly dropping the bike and I rushed on up the trail.

Ten minutes later I came to a bank. Down at the bottom was a small log cabin. I went up and knocked at the door. (Name) opened it and told me to come in.

Just in front of me was his moms bed. It was a smal matress covered by a huge bedspread. To the right of me was a small, rusty barrel with various foods on it. Just in front of that was another barrel, slightly larger than the first with legs and a chimney coming out of it. To the left was a ladder. We climbed up it into a loft. This was (Name) room. A few books were stacked in one corner but the rest was his bed. All in All cabin couldn't be more than 10 by 10. There was no electricity or plumbing. About 15 yards to the right of the cabin was a creek. This was where they did their wash.

(Name) and I had many adventures together. Each one strengthened our friendship. We were almost inseperable. I remember once at school (Name) kicked a soccer ball with those horrendous boots on. It cracked it. Then another day we were eating lunch and a smell secreted from the room nextdoor. (Name) room. He had brought sardines to eat.

Those are very minor times. I couldn't write even one of our adventures together. It just wouldn't be right. You'd have to have been there to get the essence of how good a friend he was.

As you can tell (Name) had moved. This just about broke my heart. About a year ago the owner of their cabin burnt it down. Whenever I feel lonely I wander up that trail and sit on (Name) old stove and think about him.

I don't know where (name) is now but I wish I did.

and

True Friend

I have known my friend for most of my life. Her name is (Name). (Name) died on the last day of school last year. She was 72. You've asked me to say what about her was so important to me, but its hard to describe a person who seemed nearly perfect. I'll try, though, to tell you about this one person who has so influenced my life.

I met (name) at the hospital. I really don't remember it too well, because I had just "arrived". She stayed through the whole thing, never sleeping.

The next thing I remember it was two-and-a-half years later. My mom and my natural father were divorced. (Name) and her husband, (Name), opened their home to us. I remember the early morning sunlight streaming in through cracks in the shade. My mom would seldom be awake yet, so I'd lie there for a while--listening to (Name) and (Name)'s voice. I'd everntually get up and toddle on down to the kitchen. (Name) would be there making french toast, without the crusts of course, or another of my favorite dishes. Though we moved several times (Name) and (Name) went with us, so the morning routine remained about the same.

While I do have memories of the past and a younger (Name), I really remember Her in her later years. I remember when she couldn't run with me as much, but if you looked in her eyes you'd see her spirit did. I remember her as a young spirit trapped in an aging body. She'd stand and clap while I did very imperfect cartwheels. She watched T.V. with me; programs she hated, just to be with me. Finally she'd argue with me. Our arguing was never in anger. Well almost never. We argued 'cause it was fun.

But, what really really sticks are the movies. In the two years before her death we went to a movie almost every Sunday. We saw everything from <u>Gremlins</u> and <u>E.T.</u> to <u>Chan is Missing</u>, a black and white, terrible, foreign film. On the way to the movie we'd argue: shaking our fingers at each

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other, schreeching, and otherwise causing a ruckus. (Name) would drop us off and park once we got to the movie. We'd see the movie. On the way back she'd try to buy me something to eat. If she couldn't do that she'd try to pay me for my ticket (we <u>tried</u> to go dutch treat). Eventually they'd drop me off at home (Mom remarried so we didn't live together). It was a cycle to be repeated every Sunday.

However everything was not carefree. (Name) had already had two heart attacks and took four different medications daily. Though she almost never let it show she was in constant pain. She hated hospitals and doctors. She kept changing doctors 'cause she'd tell them what to do. She had a firery personality, a devilish temper, and a free spirit. Until she went to the hospital I didn't know she was having problems. Three days later she died. I wil always love my grandma, and true friend--(Name).

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FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Countless factors can affect a student's performance, and though we can only hypothesize about what factors may have been most important for this assessment, a brief review of potential influences may assist you in interpreting the data for an individual student--or for a district or the state as a whole.

1. The Prompt: For some students, the prompt may have been too structured, too leading. For others, quite the opposite could have been true. In the absence of teacher-directed prewriting and peer response activities, it may be difficult for some students to demonstrate their best writing. It is not possible for formal assessment to incorporate such activities on a statewide basis because there is no means for ensuring consistency in the way that they are handled; thus, some students will inevitably have an advantage.

2. Attitude: Both the attitude of the teacher in the classroom and the attitude of the student have direct bearing on performance. If the attitude is notably positive and enthusiastic, that is often reflected in the quality of the writing and the willingness to try something new.

3. Understanding of the Exercise: Every effort was made to standardize administration procedures and to provide clear instructions that would help students do their best. Nevertheless, there is always the chance that some students may have misunderstood the assignment or may have had difficulty with it for some reason.

4. Curriculum and Instruction: We must recognize at the outset that curriculum differs widely district to district, school to school, and even classroom to classroom. An instructor who spends a great deal of instructional time on Organization and Development, for example, may be considerably less pleased with the statewide results than one who spends relatively little time and has, therefore, much different expectations about student performance.

5. Students' Age: The question of friendship is a complex one, and we might reasonably expect that the responses most individuals would give would change with age and maturity. Some students already showed startling insight--a remarkable capacity to think through the issue of friendship and to sort out values. For others, friendship seemed little more than an opportunity to participate in the same activities. While the writing certainly reveals that some students thought the prompt through more carefully than others, we must still acknowledge that in many cases, the ideas expressed in the papers are simply reflections of values and priorities that are still in transition.

6. Test Anxiety: For many students, test anxiety is so overwhelming that it may preclude top-level performance. This is particularly unfortunate in this case since the statewide writing assessment is not really a test in the usual sense at all. It is a diagnosis of performance intended to provide a data base for improving instruction. We may wish to consider in future years whether this purpose might be made more clear to the students who participate.

7. Length of Testing Time: Although this was not a timed test, two 45 minute periods were suggested for administration of the test. Feedback from teachers indicated that the time suggested was too short for some students and too long for others. In some cases, teachers were not able to allocate the amount of time suggested. Variations in the amount of time students had to write could have affected the quality of the writing.

Certainly many other factors can influence performance as well--a student's health on the day of testing, for example, or current frame of mind. We ask you to keep these and other factors in mind as you interpret the results.

A BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE

The recommendations issued by the 1985 Statewide Writing Assessment Interpretive Panel place great emphasis on the value of inservice to help teachers improve the teaching of writing. Your responses to the following brief questions could be of great help to us in planning inservice activities related to writing assessment and writing instruction.

1. Professional Status:
   - __ Teacher
   - __ Educational Administrator
   - __ Curriculum Coordinator
   - __ Writer/Editor
   - __ Other (please specify) _____

2. If you are a teacher, what subject(s) and grade levels do you teach?

3. Have you participated in the Oregon Writing Project? __ Yes __ No

4. Would you like more information on the Oregon Writing Project?

5. Have you attended workshops/seminars on the teaching or assessment of writing during the past six months that you would recommend to colleagues? If so, would you identify them?

6. Are you interested in receiving training in writing assessment? If so, please specify your interests:

   - __ Holistic Assessment
   - __ Analytical Assessment (based on the Oregon Scoring Model)
   - __ Primary Trait Assessment
   - __ Classroom applications of writing assessment

7. Are you interested in attending inservice related to the instruction of writing? If so, please specify your interests:

   - __ Managing the peer review process
   - __ Teaching writing as a process
   - __ Building students' editing skills
   - __ Helping students generate and develop ideas
   - __ Helping students organize ideas more effectively
   - __ Using classroom assessment effectively
   - __ Other (please specify):

8. Name and Address:

Please mail to the Oregon Department of Education [address and postage provided].

APPENDIX A

ANALYTICAL SCORING GUIDE

OREGON WRITING ASSESSMENT MODEL: SCORING GUIDE

ANALYTICAL TRAIT: IDEAS/CONTENT

5 PAPER

This paper creates a clear impression or sense of purpose and holds the reader's attention throughout. The writer discusses the main point long enough so the reader can tell what is meant.

- Evidence that the writer has given careful thought to the topic/response.
- Writer shows definite sense of control—ideas work in a coordinated way to support or reflect central purpose.
- Often shows unusual insight or perspective.

3 PAPER

The writer's purpose or intent may be reasonably clear, but the result is not especially captivating—often fails to hold the reader's attention throughout.

- Insight is sufficient to carry the topic, but is not striking or thought provoking in the way that the writer intended.
- Some evidence that writer has considered ideas, but he/she may not have thought things through all the way. Ideas tend toward the mundane—reader isn't sorry to see the paper end.
- There is some sense of control, but it may be weak or inconsistent.

1 PAPER

Paper tends to be highly predictable, full of cliches, or simply unclear altogether.

- Insight is highly limited or lacking—virtually no sense or purpose.
- No evidence that writer has thoughtfully explored or prepared ideas; writing tends to read like a rote response.
- Little or no sense of control. The paper may seem to go off in different directions, or to simply reflect an effort to get <u>something</u> down on paper.

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ANALYTICAL TRAIT: ORGANIZATION & DEVELOPMENT

5 PAPER

The central idea or impression is clear, whether stated directly or implied. Secondary ideas/examples are clear, complete, and relevant to central idea. Arrangement follows an effective sequence or clearly identifiable pattern.

- Writer provides a clear sense of beginning and ending, with an appealing intro and an effective wrap-up or conclusion.
- Uses transitional words, phrases, and sentences to tie ideas together logically.
- Ideas (primary and secondary) are developed in proportion to their significance.
- In narrative, the order of events is clear.

3 PAPER

Though central idea or impression is reasonably clear, secondary ideas/examples may be insufficient, conflicting, or illogical so that the main idea isn't supported as well as it should be. There is an attempt to arrange ideas effectively, but the pattern may be unclear, or the arrangement awkward.

- Writer seems to have some sense of beginning and ending, but intro and conclusion tend to be less effective than desired.
- Organization of some papers tends to follow conventional patterns in predictable, sometimes forced ways.
- Transitions tend to be adequate, but less fluid than desired.
- Ideas are sometimes developed out of proportion to significance—e.g., too much attention to minor details.
- In narrative, it may occasionally be hard to tell which event happened first.

1 PAPER

Central idea or impression is vague, poorly stated, or difficult to infer. Ideas are haphazardly arranged, arguments hard to follow, details disjointed and unrelated.

- No clear sense of beginning or ending.
- Paper seems to go in one direction, then another and another, till reader is lost.
- Transitions are very weak, or nonexistent.
- Ideas are rarely developed in proportion to significance. Development tends to be sporadic and uneven, or to focus far too much on secondary details.
- In narrative, reader really cannot tell which event comes first or goes with any other event.

ANALYTICAL TRAIT:
STYLE

5 PAPER

Writer seems sincere and candid, seems to be writing what he or she knows (often from experience). The overall effect is individualistic; this paper stands out from the others.

- Writer seems strongly committed to and involved with the topic.
- There's an honest effort to create and communicate, a strong awareness of and concern for the audience.
- Tone is appropriate to topic and audience, and is consistently controlled.
- Paper is often marked by appealing liveliness, originality, excitement, suspense, or humor.

3 PAPER

Writer makes an honest effort to deal with the topic, but without a strong sense of personal commitment or involvement. He/she may lean too heavily on generalities and accepted truths.

- Writer often seems self-conscious or unwilling to take a risk, or willing to settle for generalities.
- While the writing is sincere, there is little attention to the small details that would show the writer knows what he/she is talking about.
- Awareness of audience is often limited; however, the writer avoids impersonal or "put on" tone.
- Paper communicates, but only in a routine, predictable fashion.

1 PAPER

There is little or no evidence of conscious effort to deal seriously or honestly with the topic. The writer seems not to have taken the assignment to heart, or simply not to have understood or cared.

- There is no identifiable voice behind the words—things seem tossed together haphazardly.
- The writer's attitudes may seem contradictory, unrelated to the topic, or vague and poorly defined. Sense of conviction is absent.
- There is no sense that writer is even addressing an audience, much less that he/she is aware of that audience.
- Tone, if identifiable, may be inappropriate to topic or audience or both—or else the writing is SO flat, lifeless, devoid of feeling that nothing recognizable as "tone" emerges at all.

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ANALYTICAL TRAIT:
EFFECTIVE WORD CHOICE

5 PAPER

Writer consistently selects words that convey the intended message accurately, precisely, and interestingly.

- Word choice is accurate, specific, and suited to the subject.
- Writer may experiment with uncommon words, or use common words in a delightful way.
- Writer may strive for vivid, colorful language—but it isn't overdone.
- Expression is generally appealing—may be fresh or original—fun to read.
- If figurative language is used, it's effective.
- General absence of cliches, slang (except as used for effect).

3 PAPER

Writer generally selects words that get the meaning across adequately, but the overall result tends more toward the ordinary that the exciting or entertaining.

- Language is reasonably descriptive, but reader generally has the feeling that there was a better way to say it.
- Cliches and hackneyed phrases pop up with disappointing frequency; there are few surprises or twists to entice the reader.
- Writer doesn't strive for the "best" way to say something, but says it pretty much as anyone else probably would.
- May be some attempts at the unusual or colorful in some papers, but these tend to be overdone, with "big" words or too many descriptive words used to impress, not used because they fit.
- Figurative language, if attempted, often does not work well.

1 PAPER

Writer is using a limited vocabulary, or groping for words or phrases to convey a meaning that may never clearly emerge.

- Language tends to be consistently flat, vague, trite.
- Words lack precision, and imagery is very weak.
- Writing is often characterized by monotonous repetition, or overwhelming reliance on trite, tired words and phrases (or slang), with virtually no attempt to try what's new.
- Word choice seems careless, and may often be just plain wrong.
- In some papers the word choice may be so far off the mark that the reader simply cannot infer any sensible meaning.

ANALYTICAL TRAIT:
SYNTAX/SENTENCE STRUCTURE

5 PAPER

The paper reads easily throughout, and flows smoothly from one idea to the next. (Do not consider punctuation errors here; they are covered under "conventions".)

- Sentence structure is typically correct, and fluent as well; it clearly enhances meaning. Some sentences may be appropriately long or complex enough to allow full development of ideas or descriptions.
- Writer shows a real sense of control, and writing seems to flow in a natural, unselfconscious way.
- Most papers have varied sentence structure that adds interest and style.
- Writing is appropriately concise, not wordy.
- Run-ons or fragments, if present, are effective.

3 PAPER

Paper is generally understandable; sentence structure is generally correct, but is not characterized by a natural grace. (Do not consider punctuation errors here.)

- Writer shows control with simple sentence structure, and variable control when more complex patterns are attempted.
- Occasional sentence faults may necessitate slower reading or re-reading; however, these flaws are seldom severe enough to actually obscure meaning.
- Sentences may tend to follow a consistent pattern, or may sometimes simply lack energy, or effectiveness (e.g., some papers may show a penchant for wordiness or passive structure).
- Structure may seem halting, self-conscious.
- Fragments and run-ons, if present, tend to result from oversight rather than efforts at stylistic effectiveness.

1 PAPER

Serious or repeated sentence flaws make this paper difficult to read; just getting through it takes real effort and concentration. (Do not consider punctuation errors here.)

- Short, choppy sentences often abound.
- Sentences generally lack fluency; they may seem disjointed, awkward, endlessly rambling, or nonsensical.
- Nondeliberate fragments and run-ons are common. Writer may seem to have little grasp of how words fit together, or of where one idea logically stops and the next begins.

ANALYTICAL TRAIT:
WRITING CONVENTIONS
(GRAMMAR, CAPITALIZATION, PUNCTUATION, USAGE, SPELLING, PARAGRAPHING)

5 PAPER

Writer has a good grasp of standard writing conventions. There are no glaring errors. In fact, errors tend to be so minor that reader can easily overlook them unless searching for them specifically.

- Sentence structure and paragraphing tend to be sound.
- Agreement is correct.
- Punctuation is smooth and enhances meaning. (Informalities—use of dashes, contractions—are allowed.)
- Spelling is generally correct.

3 PAPER

Errors in writing conventions begin to impair readability. Sentence structure is generally correct on simple sentences, though more complicated patterns may contain such problems as faulty parallelism, inconsistent tense, voice shift (e.g., first to second person), dangling modifiers, or vague pronoun reference.

- Errors may reflect hasty writing or careless attention to detail in editing.
- Reader can follow what's being said overall, but errors in conventions may require the reader to pause or re-read on occasion.

1 PAPER

There are so many errors in usage, sentence structure, spelling, and/or punctuation that the paper is hard to understand.

- Student shows very limited understanding of or ability to apply conventions.
- Basic punctuation tends to be omitted, haphazard, or just plain wrong.
- Spelling errors are typically frequent, even on common words.
- Fragments, run-ons, and awkward constructions abound.

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APPENDIX B

STATEWIDE SUMMARY REPORT

SAMPLE SCHOOL SUMMARY REPORT

OREGON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT 1985

WRITING
GRADE 8

NUMBER OF STUDENTS TESTED: 5788

STATE SUMMARY REPORT

WRITING SKILL AREA	Average Score	AVERAGE STUDENT SCORE 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
IDEAS/CONTENT	5.9	5.9 ± 5.9
ORGANIZATION/DEVELOPMENT	5.5	5.5 ± 5.5
STYLE	6.4	6.4 ± 6.4
EFFECTIVE WORD CHOICE	6.1	6.1 ± 6.1
SYNTAX/SENTENCE STRUCTURE	6.2	6.2 ± 6.2
WRITING CONVENTIONS	6.1	6.1 ± 6.1

WRITING SKILL AREA	DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT SCORES (Percentage of students at each score level) Not Scored	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
IDEAS/CONTENT	1.8	0.5	1.9	11.1	19.5	38.8	16.7	7.4	1.5	0.5
ORGANIZATION/DEVELOPMENT	1.8	0.6	3.3	20.5	24.3	28.8	13.3	5.6	1.0	0.5
STYLE	1.8	0.1	0.4	3.0	12.1	43.9	22.9	12.1	2.5	0.9
EFFECTIVE WORD CHOICE	1.8	0.0	0.3	2.7	13.1	62.0	13.9	4.5	1.2	0.3
SYNTAX/SENTENCE STRUCTURE	1.8	0.2	1.2	7.0	15.3	41.8	19.3	10.2	2.2	0.6
WRITING CONVENTIONS	1.8	0.5	2.1	10.2	16.7	31.7	19.5	12.5	3.4	1.4

OREGON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT 1985

WRITING
GRADE 8

NUMBER OF STUDENTS TESTED: 205

DISTRICT:

SCHOOL:

SCHOOL SUMMARY REPORT

WRITING SKILL AREA	Average Score	AVERAGE STUDENT SCORE (2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10)
IDEAS/CONTENT	6.3	
ORGANIZATION/DEVELOPMENT	6.1	
STYLE	7.0	
EFFECTIVE WORD CHOICE	6.4	
SYNTAX/SENTENCE STRUCTURE	6.4	
WRITING CONVENTIONS	6.2	

‡ = School Average Δ = State Average

WRITING SKILL AREA	Level of Test Results	DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENT SCORES (Percentage of students at each score level)									
		Not Scored	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
IDEAS/CONTENT	School	2.9	0.0	1.0	10.2	16.6	24.9	22.0	18.0	4.4	0.0
	State	2.8	0.5	1.8	11.3	19.2	38.8	16.1	7.5	1.4	0.5
ORGANIZATION/DEVELOPMENT	School	2.9	0.5	1.5	13.2	20.5	21.5	22.0	14.6	2.9	0.5
	State	2.8	0.7	3.2	20.6	23.9	28.8	12.9	5.6	1.0	0.5
STYLE	School	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.8	29.8	24.4	26.8	7.8	1.5
	State	2.8	0.1	0.4	3.1	11.8	44.0	22.3	12.1	2.4	0.9
EFFECTIVE WORD CHOICE	School	2.9	0.0	0.5	0.5	7.8	54.1	24.9	5.9	2.4	1.0
	State	2.8	0.0	0.3	2.7	12.8	61.8	13.4	4.7	1.0	0.4
SYNTAX/SENTENCE STRUCTURE	School	2.9	0.0	0.5	4.9	12.7	37.6	24.9	11.7	3.4	1.5
	State	2.8	0.2	1.1	7.1	14.9	41.9	19.2	10.2	2.0	0.7
WRITING CONVENTIONS	School	2.9	0.5	2.9	7.8	13.7	33.7	23.9	10.2	3.4	1.0
	State	2.8	0.5	2.1	10.3	16.2	32.2	18.8	12.5	3.2	1.3

The Testin ocedure

During the week of March 4, approximately 6,000 students were asked to write an essay based on the writing topic to the right. A two-day testing session was conducted. On the first day, students were given 45 minutes to write a rough draft; on the second day, students were given an additional 45 minutes to revise their rough drafts and write their final copies. The final versions of student essays were scored according to the criteria outlined below.

The Writing Topic

Think of a special friend you have, did have once, or would like to have in the future. What are some things about this person that make you value his or her friendship? This person might have had some particularly good qualities, a special personality, or might have been especially helpful to you, or just have been enjoyable company. In your writing, be sure to include these things:

- name the friend;
- tell what it is about the person that is so important to you;
- use specific examples that show why you value this person's friendship.

HOW TO INTERPRET THE SCHOOL SUMMARY REPORT

Description of Skills Tested and Scoring Procedures.

The state writing test was designed to yield scores in six areas of writing skill through an analytical scoring procedure. Each paper was read independently by two readers who rated it on a 5 point scale in each area. The two ratings were then summed to yield a score ranging from 2 (poorest) to 10 (best).

The skill areas, along with brief descriptions of the characteristics of papers receiving scores of 5, 3, and 1 (or 10, 6, and 2 when the two ratings are summed) are as follows:

IDEAS/CONTENT

5 paper: This paper creates a clear impression or sense of purpose and holds the reader's attention throughout. The writer discusses the main point long enough so the reader can tell what is meant.

3 paper: The writer's purpose or intent may be reasonably clear, but the result is not especially captivating - often fails to hold the reader's attention throughout.

1 paper: Paper tends to be highly predictable, full of cliches, or simply unclear altogether.

ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

5 paper: The central idea or impression is clear, whether stated directly or implied. Secondary ideas/examples are clear, complete, and relevant to central idea. Arrangement follows an effective sequence or clearly identifiable pattern.

3 paper: Though central idea or impression is reasonably clear, secondary ideas/examples may be insufficient, conflicting, or illogical so that the main idea isn't supported as well as it should be. There is an attempt to arrange ideas effectively, but the pattern may be unclear, or the arrangement awkward.

1 paper: Central idea or impression is vague, poorly stated, or difficult to infer. Ideas are haphazardly arranged, arguments hard to follow, details disjointed and unrelated.

STYLE

5 paper: Writer seems sincere and candid, seems to be writing what he or she knows (often from experience). The overall effect is individualistic; this paper stands out from the others.

3 paper: Writer makes an honest effort to deal with the topic, but without a strong sense of personal commitment or involvement. He/she may lean too heavily on generalities and accepted truths.

1 paper: There is little or no evidence of conscious effort to deal seriously or honestly with the topic. The writer seems not to have taken the assignment to heart, or simply not to have understood or cared.

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EFFECTIVE WORD CHOICE

5 paper: Writer consistently selects words that convey the intended message accurately, precisely, and interestingly.

3 paper: Writer generally selects words that get the meaning across adequately, but the overall result tends more toward the ordinary than the exciting or entertaining.

1 paper: Writer is using a limited vocabulary, or groping for words or phrases to convey a meaning that may never clearly emerge.

SYNTAX/SENTENCE STRUCTURE

5 paper: The paper reads easily throughout, and flows smoothly from one idea to the next. (Do not consider punctuation errors here; they are covered under "conventions".)

3 paper: Paper is generally understandable; sentence structure is generally correct, but is not characterized by a natural grace. (Do not consider punctuation errors here.)

1 paper: Serious or repeated sentence flaws make this paper difficult to read; just getting through it takes real effort and concentration. (Do not consider punctuation errors here.)

WRITING CONVENTIONS

5 paper: Writer has a good grasp of standard writing conventions. There are no glaring errors. In fact, errors tend to be so minor that reader can easily overlook them unless searching for them specifically.

3 paper: Errors in writing conventions begin to impair readability. Sentence structure is generally correct on simple sentences, though more complicated patterns may contain such problems as faulty parallelism, inconsistent tense, voice shift (e.g., first to second person), dangling modifiers, or vague pronoun reference.

1 paper: There are so many errors in usage, sentence structure, spelling, and/or punctuation that the paper is hard to understand.

Information Presented in the School Summary Report.

The results describing the performance of students in your school are displayed in two ways. At the top of the report, the average score of your students is plotted for each of the six writing areas. The bar extending on either side of the school average represents the standard error of the mean. This indicates the range of scores which can reasonably be expected to contain your school's "true" score.

Also shown in this portion of the report are the state average scores. These averages reflect the performance of all 6,300 8th graders included in the state sample for writing.

At the bottom of the report, the distribution of student scores in each writing skill area is shown for your school and the state sample. These figures indicate the percentage of students receiving a given score.

APPENDIX C

OREGON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT 1985
COMMITTEE MEMBERS

WRITING

Interpretive Panel

Thelda Bevens, Oregon Department of Education
Darlene Clarridge, North Clackamas School District
Wayne Johnston, North Clackamas School District
Berenice Jolliver, Washington County Analytical Scoring Team
Sheila Peabody, Bend School District
Lana Stanley, Pendleton School District
Nathaniel Teich, University of Oregon
Marlyn Willardson, Clackamas County ESD

Test Content Panel

Mary Lee Alberts, Grants Pass School District
Dorothy Bean-Smith, Beaverton School District (retired)
Thelda Bevens, Oregon Department of Education
Darlene Clarridge, North Clackamas School District
Frank Mazzio, Oregon Department of Education
Lana Stanley, Pendleton School District
Nathaniel Teich, University of Oregon
Ann Ulum, Coos County ESD
Marlyn Willardson, Clackamas County ESD

Technical Advisory Committee

Eric Bigler, Clackamas County ESD
John Erickson, Stayton School District
Bob Hammond, Springfield School District
Walt Hathaway, Portland School District
Dale Hess, Oregon Educational Coordinating Commission
Charlene Hurst, Salem School District
Bonnie Nalley, Douglas County ESD
Jean Pope, Jackson County ESD
Jens Robinson, McMinnville School District
Don Shutt, Pendleton School District
Peter Wolmut, Multnomah County ESD

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